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2007 - 2011 **OUR RESEARCH AN OVERVIEW**



**The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC
Child Protection Research Centre***
Informing policy and practice to keep
children and young people safe

*Previously known as: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC
Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP).

A summary of this document is also available, titled:
Our Research: A Brief Synopsis (2007 - 2011).

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FOREWORD

The challenges for those working within the field of child protection are immense. Yet organisations and professionals working across the UK can and do make a difference to children. To be effective requires constant vigilance and joint working and so, **at the Child Protection Research Centre, we join with those working to keep children and young people safe by bringing our research, knowledge and insights to support this important work.**

Our work encompasses all areas of child protection. We want to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from all forms of child maltreatment: emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect; and where they have already been harmed, to help them recover as quickly and as fully as possible.

We are pleased to provide you with this overview of our research since our inception, along with a synopsis of some current areas of study. More information and detailed reports can be found on our website or by contacting us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Stafford." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Anne Stafford, Director

OUR RESEARCH CENTRE

The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre was set up in 2007. Our research is designed to generate a more integrated and deeper understanding of child protection in the UK and internationally, in order to strengthen policy and practice.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Through our research we contribute information and insights to ensure child protection systems are able to respond effectively to children in need of protection wherever they live.

Ultimately we want all children in the UK to be safe from all forms of abuse and neglect. Our contribution to this involves providing independent, internationally relevant research and the fostering of dialogue to improve child protection systems. Within this context we do two kinds of research:

- 1. Critical comparison and analysis** of child protection developments in legislation, policy and systems (see sections 1 and 2)
- 2. Primary research** in areas of identified priority or gaps (see sections 3 to 6).

GOVERNANCE, SET UP AND PRIORITIES

The Centre is part-funded by the **NSPCC** (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) and is based within the prestigious **University of Edinburgh**, situated within the Moray House School of Education. This unique collaboration ensures that our work combines academic rigour and independence with strong links to policy and practice.

Our research has been conducted with funding from the NSPCC, and from other external grants secured for specific projects. All our work is designed to contribute to child protection developments as a whole, and to contribute knowledge to the NSPCC's priority goal of solving entrenched child protection problems.

With representation from all four nations of the UK, our **Advisory Committee** is pivotal to ensuring the relevance and applicability of our work. Our **skilled team** works closely with other researchers from a range of disciplines with expertise in child protection. Working collaboratively, we are committed to the process of creating better quality child protection systems.

OUR RESEARCH

Since our founding, we have examined the direction of child protection reform, trends in policy, and the impact of devolution on child protection. In addition, the Centre has undertaken specific studies in areas of identified priority and gaps in child protection research.

OUR RESEARCH

2007 - 2011

ABOUT THIS OVERVIEW

This document provides a flavour of our research findings which are highlighted in our books, journal articles, reports and briefings.

The following sections provide an overview of some of the research conducted in the Centre between 2007 and 2011. To date we have looked at the direction of child protection reform, trends in policy and the impact of devolution on policy developments, examining in particular the extent of divergence between the four nations of the UK.

Sections 1 and 2 of this Overview focus on our UK comparative work, brought together in our book: *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis* (Stafford, A., Parton N., Vincent S. and Smith C., 2011. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

In the remaining sections we outline our research in four other areas:

- harm and abuse in sport;
- child deaths and serious abuse;
- the support needs of children and young people who have had to leave home because of domestic abuse; and
- reporting child protection in the media.

More information on these and other studies can be found on our website (www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk) and in various publications – see the end of each section for further details.

COMPARATIVE WORK

In the following two sections we highlight key findings from the specific studies we have conducted which have made up our UK comparative work.

Section 1

Understanding child protection developments in the United Kingdom

Section 2

Understanding child protections systems, structures and processes: a UK comparison

**‘APPROACHES TO PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ABUSE
[HAVE] BECOME MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN THOSE
OPERATING IN THE EARLY/MID 1990s’ (STAFFORD ET AL 2011).**

Understanding child protection developments in the United Kingdom

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH: ONGOING

ABOUT THIS AREA OF STUDY¹

A major reason the Centre was set up in 2007 was in recognition that one consequence of devolution in the UK might be to open up new opportunities for child protection systems and processes to diverge from each other; for the devolved parts of the UK to seek new and more local solutions to long standing child protection problems. From our inception, we set out to systematically track child protection developments across the UK, analyse and comment on the way systems have shifted and changed in response to devolution – and other drivers for change, and to feed new insights and knowledge into the child protection policy decision making process in the UK.

From a situation in 2007 where there was relatively scant detailed comparative research available on the similarities and differences between child protection systems in different parts of the UK, a new body of work has been built as a result of our work. We pulled this together for our book *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A comparative analysis* published in 2011. In this section of the Overview, we set out and summarise some of the key findings from this work².

The importance of being able to learn by comparing has been pivotal and we have adopted a cross-country case study approach, where researchers immerse themselves in each case speaking to key informants, and looking at legislation and policy guidance and how this translates into practice. This has helped us generate a comprehensive picture of how child protections systems across the UK are shifting and changing.

¹ For further detail and references see: Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent, S. and Smith C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

² Political landscapes and child protection policy, systems and guidance are constantly evolving; every effort has been made to ensure information is current as at January 2012.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

DIRECTION OF REFORM IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Historically across the world there have been two dominant approaches or orientations to protecting children. The Anglophone countries (Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK) have traditionally been more procedural in their approach which has been on protecting a small number of children who are considered to be at a high risk of abuse. This **child protection approach** has typically resulted in twin problems of over- and under-identification of children at risk, and in some countries (e.g. the UK) there have been high levels of public distrust and pessimism (Cooper et al 1992). Systems in the Nordic countries and Continental Europe have traditionally adopted a broader approach with a focus on **family support** with child protection addressed in the context of wider child welfare systems (Gilbert et al 1997).

With globalisation and policy transfer, not only are both of these types of **systems for safeguarding children** adopting some of the orientations of the other, but increasingly all countries are moving towards a more **child-centred approach** where the child is seen as an individual with an independent relationship with the state and children's services. In this approach the state, in recognising the need for healthy and contributing citizens both now and in the future, seeks to meet the needs of each child, rather than be singularly focused on reducing risk (Gilbert, Parton et al 2011; Stafford et al 2011).

UK POWERS AND DEVOLUTION

Legislation devolving political powers to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales was passed from 1999. The three systems have different constitutional arrangements and distinct relationships with the UK Government. Devolution is further complicated in that the Government³ in London operates as both the Government of the UK and of England. England is also the biggest player – with five times the population of the other three parts together, and significantly larger policy making capacity. Because of this, England occupies a unique position in the UK and often sets the context within which the devolved nations operate; and this has meant that the devolved nations have typically developed bi-lateral relationships with England rather than between themselves. With fewer resources the smaller nations engage in significant policy 'borrowing' – mostly from England (Jeffrey et al 2010).

Boundaries between devolved and non-devolved matters are not always sharply distinguished, are usually interrelated and do change. Because of this disputes in specific policy areas have arisen 'with Westminster and Whitehall combining and often confusing the territorial scales of their responsibilities' (Jeffrey et al 2010).

Prior to devolution there were concerns that the UK Government would try to exert undue pressure on the devolved administrations. There was also the expectation that devolution would result in policy divergence. In practice, this does not seem to have happened to any great extent. Indeed, England seems to be more in the process of 'disengaging from devolution' than 'interfering' (Keating et al. Forthcoming 2012). Additionally, policy borrowing and limited

³ Often referenced using the metonyms 'Westminster' (the Parliament with its powers to make primary legislation) and 'Whitehall' (Government administration; the civil service).

capacity within the devolved nations are some of the factors limiting divergence. As such, opportunities presented by devolution for divergence have at the same time been countered by pressures for constraint.

Currently, the four administrations of the UK have never been so different in terms of political make-up, perhaps giving further scope for divergent policy-making and for the emergence of different relationships between the four parts of the UK. Additionally, we are seeing a change; in the context of the Coalition Government there seems to be a less active approach to generating new policy than when New Labour was at the helm.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THE MUNRO REVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION IN ENGLAND

The whole system of child protection in England has recently been under the spotlight following the publication of the *Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System* (Munro, 2011). While the Report poses little change to the basic structure of the child protection system, there is likely to be a reduction in the amount of procedural guidance, and an increased emphasis on flexibility and professional judgement. It is also too early to know what the full impact the Review will have on England and on other parts of the UK.

Tracking child protection changes in each part of the UK in the context of the *Munro Review of Child Protection in England*, the economic crisis and changing political landscapes is an area of ongoing future research for the Centre.

KEY MESSAGES

From a situation in 2007 where there was relatively little detailed comparative research available on the similarities and differences between child protection systems in different parts of the UK, a new body of work has been built as a result of the Centre's research.

In terms of the broad orientation, all parts of the UK have been travelling in a direction away from being focused narrowly on child protection (with an emphasis on investigation and prosecution) towards a system where children and young people's protection needs are met in the context of their wider support needs. Along with international trends, the systems in the UK are informed increasingly by a child-centred approach, recognising the child as having an independent relationship to the state. This emphasis on the needs of all children and young people is only possible if services are available and effective. Current spending cuts raise questions about the feasibility of the current policy direction.

The devolved nations most readily relate to England as context provider; and while not necessarily adopting all that England does, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, have been more likely to follow English developments and engage with England than adopt or share insights and learning between themselves as

devolved countries. It is unclear how strongly English developments (including the Government's response to the Munro Report) will continue to provide the context for developments in the other nations.

The lack of policy capacity in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland will continue to have implications for autonomous policy making in these parts of the UK. Given their more comparable size, and relationship with England, there is arguably potential for the devolved nations to adopt a more proactive approach to learning from each other when it comes to developing and implementing policy.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Cooper, A. (1992) Anxiety and Child Protection Work in Two National Systems. *Journal of Social Work Practice* 6, 2, 117-128.

Jeffrey, C., Lodge, G. and Schmoecher, K. (2010) *The Devolution Paradox*. In Lodge G. and Schmoecher K. (eds) *Devolution in Practice*. London: IPPR.

Keating, M., Cairney, P., Hepburn, E. (forthcoming 2012) Policy Convergence, Transfer and Learning in the UK under Devolution. *Regional and Federal Studies*.

Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A Child-Centred System*. London: Department of Education.

Smith, C. (2008) *Devolution in the UK: Powers and Structures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, Briefing No. 1, June 2008. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection.

Stafford, A., Parton, N., Vincent, S. and Smith C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Stafford, A., Parton N., Vincent, S. (eds) (2010) *Child Protection Reform Across the UK*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

Stafford, A. and Vincent, S. (2008) *Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young People*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

2

'THE STORY OF CHILD PROTECTION ACROSS THE UK HAS NOT UNFOLDED IN A LINEAR OR SMOOTH WAY. RATHER, THE PROCESS HAS BEEN DISRUPTED IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGH PROFILE CHILD ABUSE SCANDALS, THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND CHANGES IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS ITSELF' (STAFFORD ET AL 2011).

Understanding child protection systems, structures and processes: a UK Comparison

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

ABOUT THIS AREA OF STUDY

Our quest to understand child protection in the United Kingdom involved us taking as wide a view as possible of child protection by comparing the UK system with other systems world-wide. We also wanted to shift our analysis to a different conceptual level, to deepen our understanding by scrutinising and comparing the inner-workings of child protection in the UK. We set this work out here³.

Within each area of the UK, child protection procedures are set down both in law and in policy guidance with their associated systems, structures and processes. In an effort to distil the extent of policy divergence since devolution, our long-term case study approach was adopted to identify similarities and differences between the four parts of the UK. This intra-country comparative methodology was applied to the main features making up child protection to gain a better understanding of each system individually, and a better understanding of the whole. To ensure robust comparison, particular attention has been paid to definitions, nuances in language (e.g. 'child protection' and 'safeguarding') and the different ways in which data is gathered across the four parts of the UK.

Findings are presented in five sections:

- 2.1 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
- 2.2 MANAGING INDIVIDUAL CASES
- 2.3 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS
- 2.4 CHILD DEATH REVIEW PROCESSES
- 2.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

³ For additional detail and references see: Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent, S and Smith C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

HEADLINE FINDINGS

2.1 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

OVERVIEW:

All parts of the UK approach child protection in broadly similar ways. To date, the devolved parts of the UK have looked to and borrowed heavily from England in developing policies and overarching frameworks.

KEY LEGISLATION:

While all parts of the UK have undergone significant reform of child protection policy, legislative change has been relatively minor. Key legislation underpinning the child protection systems in all parts of the UK remains the Children Acts which were introduced in the late 1980s and 1990s, with some adjustments being made to the Welsh and English legislation through The Children Act in 2004. Until now, Scotland's approach to developing new legislation and policy has focussed on developing guidance rather than new legislation. While the process of developing legislation and policy may be different across the UK, the principles and legislative underpinnings have general synergy.

ENGLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND
Children Act 1989 Children Act 2004	Children Act 1989 Children Act 2004 Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011	Children Northern Ireland Order 1995 Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011	Children Scotland Act 1995 Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011

OVERARCHING CHILDREN'S POLICY FRAMEWORKS:

Integrating all policy relating to children into one overarching policy document is a relatively new phenomenon for all parts of the UK. While the four parts of the UK each has a separate vision and a distinct policy framework, child protection processes have remained relatively unchanged since devolution, and the content of these frameworks is broadly similar.

ENGLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND
Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004)	Children and Young People: Rights to Action (2004)	Children and Young People – Our Pledge: Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People (2006)	Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (2008)

In general, and in relation to child protection, policy divergence has not yet happened to the extent originally envisaged. All parts of the UK approach child protection policy in broadly similar ways and have retained core elements of a forensically driven child protection system.

Thus, there has been a significant amount of reform of child protection during the past decade. However, rather than this being a radical overhaul, each part of the UK has moved in the direction of refocusing children's policy to ensure a focus on prevention and early intervention, emphasising accountability and integration. There has also been increased emphasis on the safety of all children (rather than only on those most at risk), and this has ongoing resource implications.

INTER-AGENCY GUIDANCE:

A key component of child protection in the UK is the multi-agency guidance for professionals working together to support children and young people. Despite each part of the UK having updated and amended its inter-agency guidance at different points in time, close analysis of the content highlights that while distinct, the documents share common aims and cover broadly similar ground. Guidance in England and Wales is particularly lengthy. Recently, Scottish practitioners have been requesting more guidance around risk (Vincent and Daniel, 2010). *The Munro Review of Child Protection* indicates a need to consider how best to improve outcomes for children, including reducing the amount of guidance – which some highlight may be a barrier to effective professional practice.

ENGLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND
Working Together to Safeguard Children in England (2010) 390pgs	Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004 in Wales (2006) 334pgs	Co-operating to Safeguard Children in Northern Ireland (2003) 122pgs	The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2010) 170pgs







STRUCTURES:

All parts of the UK have established structures to support child protection systems including Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) or Child Protection Committees (CPCs). There are differences in the extent to which these structures are proscribed (and nationally applied), or proffered as important mechanisms within local authorities. Since devolution Scotland has tended to adopt a less statutory approach than the other parts of the UK. Scotland also has the unique 'Children's Hearings System' which is more welfare-based, aspiring to a children's rights approach to supporting children and young people who commit offences and those with welfare and protection needs.

2.2 MANAGING INDIVIDUAL CASES

All four parts of the UK have similar arrangements in place to protect individual children who may be at risk of abuse and neglect; and they follow similar broad stages including referral, investigation, case conference, management and review. The concept of ‘significant harm’ remains the threshold for compulsory intervention across the UK, and nowhere is this well defined in legislation or policy guidance. The table below is adapted from the National Child Protection Guidance document in Scotland – its broad features could equally apply in any part of the UK.

TABLE: RESPONDING TO CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS⁵

REFERRAL 	<p>Practitioners or the public can make a referral.</p> <p>Police or social work/social services/children’s social care/NSPCC determine if the situation requires an immediate response to protect the child.</p> <p>(If required, police can use their powers to remove the child or social work/social services/children’s social care can seek a ‘Child Protection Order’; in Scotland Children’s Reporters (part of the ‘Children’s Hearing System’) also receive referrals when a child is considered to be in need of care and protection.)</p>
INITIAL INFORMATION-GATHERING 	<p>Information-gathering and the decision to launch an investigation is done jointly: Police, social work/social services/children’s social care/NSPCC in consultation with health services and appropriate agencies.</p>
DECISION TO LAUNCH CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATION 	<p>Police, social work, NSPCC.</p>
PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT 	<p>Police, social work, health services and other relevant agencies agree need and arrangements for joint investigative interview and medial examination as required.</p>
CHILD PROTECTION CASE CONFERENCE 	<p>Multi-agency.</p>
CHILD PROTECTION PLAN 	<p>Implemented by a multi-agency core group.</p>
REVIEW AND POSSIBLE DE-REGISTRATION	<p>Multi-agency.</p>

⁵ PLEASE NOTE: Progressing to the next stage is contingent on the particulars of each case.
Table reproduced with permission – adapted from the National Child Protection Guidance in Scotland – See Stafford et al 2011.

While the overall processes are similar, the ways in which statistical data is gathered and published is very different. This makes it difficult to conduct meaningful UK comparative work or to be able to draw UK wide conclusions.

Since 2000 and despite the emerging emphasis on early intervention and increased family support, overall, it seems that the number of children entering the system because of child protection concerns has not decreased, but remained remarkably static. Also, despite the vast increases in policy documents and guidance, there has been surprisingly little change in procedures for managing individual cases where there are child protection concerns. It is unlikely that the increased procedural guidance has brought significant change to the experience of children and families who are part of a child protection investigation.

2.3 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

While each part of the UK has tools or frameworks for assessing the needs of all children including those who may be in need of protection, these are at different stages in development. While there are some differences between the assessment frameworks in use across the UK, all have their origins in the model developed in England.

ENGLAND	<p>The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (published in 2000) provides a systematic way of analysing, understanding and recording what is happening to children and young people within their families and the wider context of the community in which they live. It is used once a referral has been made to social care (not necessarily a child protection referral but for any child in need); it can also be used by a professional to make a referral.</p> <p>The 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF) (fully implemented in 2008) focuses on a broader group of children including those who may require early intervention; it is not intended for immediate child protection concerns.</p>
WALES	<p>The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.</p> <p>The English 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF) was piloted in four local authorities between 2007 – 2009.</p>
NORTHERN IRELAND	<p>The 'Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland' (UNOCINI) Assessment Framework was introduced in 2007 and is used for preliminary assessment by any professional within any agency. Anecdotal evidence suggests that UNOCINI assessments are increasingly being undertaken in schools, youth justice and probation as well as in health and social care.</p>
SCOTLAND	<p>'My World Triangle' introduced in Scotland in 2008 draws on the domains in the English Assessment Framework and tries to focus on both needs and risk. This is currently being adapted and tested in one local authority area.</p>

There has been a trend in the UK towards assessment frameworks becoming more child-focused, looking at the child's wider needs and identifying these needs as early as possible. However, in the current economic climate there has been some criticism that we will be unable to provide all the services which are needed in order to meet all these identified needs.

2.4 CHILD DEATH REVIEW PROCESSES

All parts of the UK now have processes in place for inquiring into or reviewing cases where a child has died as a result of child abuse or neglect. These multi-agency reviews all have as a primary purpose the aim of establishing whether lessons can be learned from a case in order to improve professional practice and outcomes for children.

While there are similarities between these processes, there are also differences in the way they are structured, including: the timetable of the review; guidance for family involvement in the process; and the criteria for conducting a review. The table below provides an overview of reviews in different parts of the UK.

	ENGLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND
Current title of reviews (2011)	Serious Case Reviews (SCR)	Serious Case Reviews (SCR)	Case Management Reviews (CMR)	Significant Case Reviews (SCR)
National approach first established	1989	1989 (and very similar to England until 2009)	2003	2007
Conducted/ commissioned by	Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs)	Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs)	Single Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (SBNI); previously Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs)	Child Protection Committees (CPCs)
Reports on aggregated findings	Yes (biennial analyses)	Yes (four analyses have been conducted since 1999)	Yes (first analysis conducted in 2010)	No (no Scotland-wide analyses have been conducted)
Current status	Changes likely in the light of the Munro Review.	New Guidance is being developed to support a new learning framework.	Guidance is being updated following the replacement of ACPCs with a new Safeguarding Board and Safeguarding Panels.	Recommendations to improve SCR consistency and practice have been accepted by the Scottish Government in 2010. A recommendation includes the need to commission analysis of SCRs undertaken since 2007.

All parts of the UK, apart from Scotland, have aggregated the findings from case reviews to ensure national as well as local learning. That SCRs continue to identify the same problems and raise the same practice issues triggered questions in Wales about their effectiveness as a learning tool. Indeed across the UK there have been debates about how best to improve the process of case review to maximise learning.

2.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Since the late 1990's there has been rapid development in mechanisms to protect children and young people from individuals who may pose a risk to them in the community (i.e. vetting, barring and multi-agency public protection systems). The table below outlines key policy across the UK which aims to reduce the risk to children.

TYPES OF OFFENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN THE UK	NUMBER OF SEPARATE SYSTEMS IN THE UK	ENGLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND
i. Multi-agency management of violent and sexual offenders (referred to as: Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in England, Scotland and Wales and Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI)).	3 systems	●	●	●	●
ii. Criminal records checks (Vetting): where employers use criminal history information to assess an individual's suitability to work with children in both voluntary and paid positions.	3 systems and bodies	●	●	●	●
iii. Barring systems: procedures under which unsuitable people are legally banned from work with children.	2 systems	●	●	●	●

Currently across the UK, all of these systems use an individual's previous behaviour as one of the indicators of potential future risk. Additionally, they all necessitate the exchange of information between agencies mirroring developments in other aspects of child protection policy where there has been an increasing emphasis on information sharing between agencies. While this policy agenda is (in part) a response to ensuring children are protected from abuse, it has also been subject to the criticism that it is overly focussed on known offenders and on risk to children from strangers.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A Child-Centred System*. London: Department of Education.

Parton, N. (2006) *Safeguarding Childhood: Early Childhood: Early Intervention and Surveillance in a Late Modern Society*. Basinstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Smith, C. (2009) *Working with Children: Vetting and Barring - Legislation and Policy in Scotland*, Briefing No. 6, February 2009. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for Learning in Child Protection.

Smith, C. (2010) *Vetting and Barring: Policy and Legislation in England and Wales*, Briefing No. 7 (revised), August 2010. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for Learning in Child Protection.

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Stafford, A., Parton, N., Vincent, S. and Smith, C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Stafford, A. and Vincent, S. (2008) *Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young People*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

Vincent, S. (2010) *Learning from Child Deaths and Serious Abuse*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

Vincent, S. (2010) *Child Protection Statistics: A UK Comparison (updated)*, Briefing No. 9, September 2010. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection.

Vincent, S. (2009) *Child Death and Significant Case Review Process: A UK Comparison*, Briefing No. 5, February 2009. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection.

KEY MESSAGES

There are many parallels in approaches to child protection across the four parts of the UK. While there are differences in terminology and in the way data is collected, child protection legislation, guidance and processes show a high degree of overlap.

Current developments, in part the result of the devolution process, could result in greater divergence in the future. For example the *Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System* (Munro, 2011) will have an impact in England – but the extent of this, and the response of the other UK countries, is unknown. Additionally, increased political differences between the four nations are also likely to have a bearing on how child protection develops across the UK.

Learning by comparing is both useful and difficult. In terms of policy evolution, it is not a static picture and continual monitoring and analysis can provide further information to inform policy development.

THEMES IN CHILD PROTECTION

In the following sections we highlight key messages and findings from our themed research in specific areas of child protection.

SECTION 3

The experiences of children participating in organised sport in the UK

SECTION 4

Learning from child deaths and serious abuse

SECTION 5

The support needs of children and young people who have to leave home because of domestic abuse

SECTION 6

The impact on policy of media coverage of child deaths in the UK

Vincent, S. (2008a) *Mechanisms for the Strategic Implementation, Development and Monitoring of Inter-agency Child Protection Policy and Practice in the UK: The Role of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs)*, Briefing No. 4, November 2008. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection.

Vincent, S. (2008b) *Inter-agency Guidance in Relation to Child Protection: A UK Comparison*, Briefing No. 2, June 2008, Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection.

Vincent, S., Daniel, B. and Jackson, S. (2010) Where Now for 'Child Protection' in Scotland? *Child Abuse Review*, 19:438–456.

'I REALLY THINK AT THAT AGE THERE SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THAT MUCH PRESSURE. I SHOULD HAVE BEEN A CHILD'

YOUNG WOMAN: DISTRICT LEVEL GYMNASTICS, LOCAL LEVEL EQUESTRIAN SPORTS.

The experiences of children participating in organised sport in the UK

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2011)

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This major three year study published in 2011 was concerned with children and young people's experiences of organised sport⁶ in the UK. It was commissioned by the NSPCC to provide information about the nature and range of negative experiences and harms faced by children across sports and at all levels of participation.

The study included two main elements: an online survey of more than 6000 students (aged 18-22) exploring their experience and retrospective views of participating in organised sport as children (up to 16yrs); and, 89 in-depth telephone interviews with young people who identified themselves in the online survey as having experienced some harm in sport and who were willing to be interviewed.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

The study highlighted that overall, participating in organised sport is a positive experience for most children and young people. However, sitting alongside this, is a negative sporting culture and ethos which was largely accepted as 'the norm'. This was mainly perpetuated by peers, coaches and other adults.

Young people in the study reported widespread emotionally harmful treatment (75%), and unacceptable levels of sexual harassment (29%). Clothing and body image were key issues, contributing to negative feelings for young people within sport contexts; this was particularly the case around puberty. Self-harm was reported equally by both boys and girls (10%).

Peers were the most common perpetrators of all forms of harm, with coaches sometimes condoning this or failing to challenge it effectively. Coaches involvement in perpetrating harmful behaviour increased as young athletes advanced through the competitive ranks.

⁶ Organised sport was defined in the study as sport that is voluntary, takes place outside school hours and includes an element of training or instruction by an adult. It did not include PE and informally arranged sport such as 'kick-about's' with friends. It did include extra-curricular sport at school, for example playing in the school team or being part of a club, based at school but taking place outside ordinary PE lessons.

KEY MESSAGES

Sport has achieved a great deal over the past ten years and made significant progress towards ensuring that children and young people are able to participate in sport safely and enjoyably. However work remains to be done. Findings from this research partly mirror findings from other UK and international studies and highlight areas of concern which sport should address.

GENERAL MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH:

- Sport should focus more on a children's rights approach to sport participation; and greater attention should be paid to creating a positive sporting ethos where children and young people are respected, and where their voices are heard and used to shape sporting experience, welfare and performance.
- Sport should build on what children and young people value about sport participation. This includes the social aspects of sport such as making friends and being part of a team.
- Sport should take steps to promote a more positive sporting and coaching ethos, at all levels of participation and in all sports.
- Sports bodies should put in place policies, procedures, training and practice which enable sport practitioners to systematically tackle harm occurring between peers.
- Sports bodies should use the findings and messages from the research to shape an examination of the culture in their own sport and address short-comings.

The research has also identified messages for coaches, coach educators, coach system builders and other adults involved in delivering youth sport, parents and children.

The full range of messages is presented in the headline findings document. (See details on right).

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CHILD DEATH REVIEW ‘GENERATES AN ECOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PREVENTABLE CHILD MORTALITY AND IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR ADVANCING EVIDENCE BASED, MULTI-LEVEL STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT CHILD HEALTH AND SAFETY’ (DESAPRIYA ET AL 2011).

Learning from child deaths and serious abuse

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2007-2010)

ABOUT THIS AREA OF RESEARCH

This area of research is concerned with the pros and cons of reviewing cases where children have died or suffered serious abuse or neglect. Early in its life, the Centre identified a research gap around child deaths and serious abuse in Scotland in comparison with the rest of the UK and this has shaped our interest in this as an area for investigation. Our work has included a number of studies:

- A review of high profile child death and significant child abuse cases in Scotland over three decades, This was a piece of primary research funded by the Centre and the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People;
- A book outlining the findings from primary research conducted by the Centre in Scotland and secondary research in the UK and elsewhere;
- Analysis of 24 serious case review overview reports for one LSCB in England.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

Evidence from Scotland (Vincent 2007; 2010) and other parts of the UK (Brandon et al 2008; Rose and Barnes 2008; Vincent 2009) suggests that the families of children who are the subject of SCRs experience multiple difficulties and it is the co-existence of several risk factors, and the way in which these various factors interact, which is important in terms of predicting death and abuse. Substance misuse, mental health issues, learning disabilities and other health difficulties may impact on parents' capacity to protect their children. In families where more than one of these factors is found, or where one or more of these factors coexists with domestic abuse, the risk may be high, particularly for young babies. Poverty, housing problems and lack of social support may be additional stress factors.

Evidence from inquiries and reviews has shown that many of the children at most serious risk may not be found within formal child protection systems. The most vulnerable children may be those on the margins of the child protection system who have minimal involvement with agencies.

For several decades now inquiries and reviews have tended to make similar recommendations and the extent to which they are a useful vehicle for generating lessons to be learned has been questioned. Child deaths as a result of neglect or abuse are comparatively rare, yet they have arguably had an inordinate and inappropriate level of influence on child protection policy. While we need to be accountable to families and to review practice in relation to individual cases 'the challenge is to expand child death reviews beyond the focus of child abuse and neglect to one of public health so as to identify preventable child deaths and achieve effective prevention' (Onwuachi-Saunders et al 1999).

In addition to processes for reviewing deaths from child abuse and neglect, some parts of the UK have introduced processes for wider review of child deaths in an attempt to expand child death review beyond the focus of child abuse and neglect. There is evidence to suggest this might be a more effective way of learning. The USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have had wider Child Death Review processes for some years. The overall purpose of these processes is to understand why children die and put in place interventions to protect other children and prevent future deaths. Child Death Review has been particularly successful in documenting the risk factors to help steer prevention efforts regarding particular types of deaths, for example, sudden unexpected deaths of infants or youth suicide. Additionally, there are a number of examples where evidence from reviews has been used to identify special population groups that need targeted prevention programmes. Child death review teams have, however, faced a number of difficulties – one of the main challenges being obtaining and sustaining adequate resources to put prevention programmes into place.

KEY MESSAGES AND RELEVANCE

Taken together the studies have identified some key messages for policy makers and practitioners:

- In order to assess the risks to children, practitioners need extensive training in child development and attachment theory, and in knowledge concerning factors such as substance misuse, mental illness and domestic abuse.
- Practitioners may need significant levels of support to work with parents who may be hostile and aggressive. They need to be able to recognise patterns of help seeking or other warning signs such as frequent visits to accident and emergency or sudden changes from co-operation to non-cooperation.
- Where children are not within the formal child protection system, staff in universal services and housing may play a key role in keeping them safe. It is important that staff in all agencies have skills and knowledge to identify and respond to signs of abuse and neglect.
- There is much we can learn about child abuse prevention from the process of reviewing child deaths. However, this is only one source of evidence. Learning from good practice and from cases where things have gone well, and from cases which are 'near misses', may be as informative as learning from cases where things have gone wrong.

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The support needs of children and young people who have to leave home because of domestic abuse

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2008)

ABOUT THE STUDY

This research explored the views, experiences and support needs of children and young people who had to move home as a result of domestic abuse. It examined their views and experiences of leaving home; the journey they made to being re-housed; the services and support they received along the way; their views of the services and support they received, and additional support they would have liked.

The research was an interview-based study of 30 young people (aged 10-16yrs) living in both rural and urban parts of Scotland. It was funded by the (then) Scottish Executive and commissioned by Women's Aid.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

In this study, young people reflected on their **experiences** of leaving home as a result of domestic abuse. Most had experienced multiple house moves, and were currently staying in accommodation they saw as temporary.

The 'first move' evoked the strongest feelings for young people. This move was usually triggered by an incident requiring them to leave home suddenly and in difficult circumstances. While most understood domestic abuse as the reason for having to leave home, information about this move was generally incomplete, with adults making decisions quickly and not sharing wholly accurate information. This could leave young people confused and resentful. Many continued to carry strong feelings about this. Subsequent moves seemed more planned, less traumatic and more positive.

A few young people experienced the first move as positive – usually where the move could be more planned, where they had information about the timing and logistics, where the new accommodation was deemed to be as good quality as the old and where there was least disruption to friendships

Moving school or returning to school following having to move house because of domestic abuse was a major source of anxiety mainly because of the impact on relationships and educational attainment. While young people did not report negative treatment from teachers and school, many lacked confidence in school as a place that could provide them with the kind of support they wanted.

In exploring the **support needs** of the young people, responses highlighted the importance of talking and the difficulties of finding someone (trustworthy) to talk to. The family was identified as a key source of support – with the role of their mothers particularly highlighted.

Friends were repeatedly highlighted as an important source of support – although young people highlighted that old friendships were often difficult to maintain, and the complexity of their lives made it difficult to confide in others.

Although there were limitations on space, the refuge was highlighted as a place of support where young people knew they were safe and where they did not have to pretend. Additionally they quickly formed bonds with new friends in the refuge. Young people also highlighted the need for somewhere to go to get away from problems, as an escape route or bolthole.

While young people lacked confidence in support from their school, practical support from other organisations (e.g. police or housing agencies) could be viewed as positive. Where agencies had dedicated children's workers, this support was highlighted as important, enabling young people to talk about their experiences, often for the first time.

Young people highlighted key **advice** they would want to **share with other young people** in similar situations. The main messages included:

- Find someone you can completely trust and talk about your problems;
- Get out of violent situations (and persuade your mum to go);
- No matter how bad it is at the time, there is help out there – it can get better.

KEY MESSAGES AND RELEVANCE

A wide range of recommendations was identified from the research, including:

- Recognise young people as active decision makers with high awareness of the situations they are in and that they may hold strong views on solutions. They appreciate honesty.
- Friendship and friendship networks are important. Support for maintaining these/building new ones cannot be underestimated.

- Address some of the practical components (e.g. money to replace precious things).
- Provide more opportunities to access counselling and therapeutic services.
- Schools can help by being more aware of difficulties faced by young people in this situation, and by addressing the concerns young people have about peer relationships when returning to school or moving school.
- Most young people experiencing domestic abuse will be living at home, with no contact/experience of the support available from refuges and/or dedicated children's support workers. Ways of reaching and supporting young people in this situation should be carefully considered, alongside efforts to challenge negative perceptions of support services. This will have resource implications for local authorities.

Findings from this study can help improve existing services aimed at supporting children and young people who have to leave violent homes, as well as inform the process of building new services.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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‘THERE HAS BEEN A LONG-TERM APPETITE IN THE MEDIA TO PORTRAY SOCIAL WORKERS IN WAYS THAT ARE NEGATIVE AND UNDERMINING’ (LAMING, 2009).

The impact on policy of media coverage of child deaths in the UK

SHORT TERM STUDY (2010)

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Following the significant media coverage of the death of Peter Connelly (Baby P, Baby Peter) (August 2007) this study explored the relationship between the media, public pressure and policy making. It used newspaper reporting of the death of Baby Peter as a case study to explore the extent to which UK media coverage has influenced policy on child death cases due to abuse and neglect.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

When the Baby Peter case became public, the UK Government immediately commissioned Lord Laming to report on progress in safeguarding children in England. How far media reporting influenced the UK Government’s announcements on the local and national reviews of child protection is difficult to ascertain, but it can be assumed that the intensive media coverage of the Baby Peter case encouraged government action in the period following the conviction of those responsible for killing Baby Peter.

Media coverage of the Baby Peter case followed a long tradition of particular child death cases attracting significant media interest with the case becoming synonymous with child abuse, debates around child protection and public discontent on the role of the state in protecting children. In addition some newspapers called on the public to petition for the resignation of the Director of Children’s Services in Haringey.

In line with a long history of the media being hostile to social workers, newspapers portrayed social workers involved in this case negatively – they were viewed as culpable in their failure to protect Baby Peter. Lord Laming highlighted that this kind of reporting has a negative impact on social workers and has serious implications for the effectiveness, status and morale of the children’s workforce as a whole.

The media coverage of Baby Peter has exposed the very public nature of child protection. Child protection referrals increased following this case; at the time of this study it was too soon to ascertain any longer-term impacts on macro policy relating to child protection.

KEY MESSAGES AND RELEVANCE

This study suggests that a more productive alliance is required between professionals, the media and public in the area of child protection in order to ensure that there is more measured debate in the reporting on child deaths.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Elsley, S. (2010) *Media Coverage of Child Deaths in the UK: The Impact of Baby P: A Case for Influence*, Briefing No. 8, June 2010, The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP).

Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London: The Stationery Office.

OUR DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Building on the past four years, we remain committed to conducting research and knowledge exchange that is responsive to developments and evolving political landscapes.

The concluding section of this Overview presents a summary of current work and emerging areas of research.

OUR DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

RESOURCING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Our core work streams are established in dialogue with key stakeholders including the NSPCC, the University of Edinburgh and the Centre's Advisory Committee; and also draw on our prior knowledge of child protection across the UK.

CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

Our current research projects include:

- **Regulating against risk versus enhancing professional autonomy:** tracking the direction of child protection policy in each part of the UK in the context of the *Munro Review of Child Protection* in England, the coalition government, cuts in public spending, devolution and changing political landscapes.
- **Provision for Young People displaying harmful sexual behaviour:** a survey to identify the scope and nature of and changes in service provision; an examination of examples of specific services; and analysis of local and national policy across the UK, providing insights into the broader conceptual frameworks in which the service provision operates.
- **Preventing child deaths: learning from review:** the study aims to pool knowledge and identify good practice across countries which review all child deaths, or all unexpected deaths (Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, England and Wales), in order to inform learning around prevention. (International research, funded by Leverhulme).
- **Learning from promising practice:** a systematic review of research and policy from Australia, Canada, UK and the USA for addressing and preventing peer sexual harm and homophobic abuse in schools and other settings.

DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

Additionally, the Centre has identified the following areas as potential areas for future research:

- **At the Cutting Edge: Emerging Policy Issues and Research Areas:** The Child Protection Research Centre sees it as a priority to stay at the cutting edge of developments in all areas of policy relating to the protection of children and young people. We conduct comparative policy research across the four nations of the United Kingdom on emerging policy issues. Similarly, we also see as a priority the need to flexibly respond to emerging research areas in child protection.
- **Safe Schools: Education and Child Protection:** Located within the Moray House School of Education, the Child Protection Research Centre has a unique role to play in examining child protection issues within educational settings. This priority is focused on keeping children and young people safe in school, making the links between children's behaviours in schools and potential child protection concerns in the home and elsewhere; ensuring teachers and other staff are able to confidentially and appropriately handle a wide variety of child protection concerns in the classroom. This strand of research will also explore innovative and promising practices for addressing child protection issues within schools.
- **Peer-to-Peer: Children and Young People Who Harm Others:** Recent prevalence studies indicate that young people are more likely to experience violence or abuse from another child or young person than from an adult. Major gaps in research, theory and practice still exists in our understanding of the issue and how best to respond and prevent children and young people from harming others.

- **Moving Upstream: A Focus on Prevention:** Very little research exists that focuses on the prevention of violence against children and young people. The Centre sees prevention as a priority area including research on engaging children and young people, communities, policy makers and service providers in 'moving upstream' and identifying the root causes of child abuse and neglect at the individual, relationship, community and society levels as well as evaluating promising practices for prevention in the United Kingdom.

For more detail on these and other projects visit www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

In the past four years we have built a considerable body of work contributing knowledge and understanding to the reform process of child protection across the UK. We have produced five books, numerous reports and briefing papers. We have hosted seminars and events to advance discussion around these important themes.

The NSPCC, The University of Edinburgh and the Centre are all committed to pursuing a programme of knowledge exchange that leads to positive impact – promoting dialogue and exchange between policy makers, practitioners and academics. To do this we connect with key audiences online, through printed resources, and at events. We continue to host UK-wide seminars to promote learning between the UK nations.

STAY CONNECTED

If you would like to receive ongoing updates and invitations to future seminars and events, please join our mailing list at: www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk.



ABOUT THIS OVERVIEW

The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre was set up in 2007. Our research is designed to generate a more integrated and deeper understanding of child protection in the UK and internationally, in order to strengthen policy and practice.

Since our founding, we have examined the direction of child protection reform, trends in policy, and the impact of devolution on child protection. In addition, the Centre has undertaken specific studies in areas of identified priority and gaps in child protection research. This Overview provides a flavour of our research findings (2007 - 2011) which are highlighted in our books, journal articles, reports and briefings.

A summary of this document is also available, titled: *Our research: A Brief Synopsis (2007 - 2011)*.

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH / NSPCC

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The Centre was previously known as:
The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC
Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP).
This name is featured on publications produced between 2007 - 2011.

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